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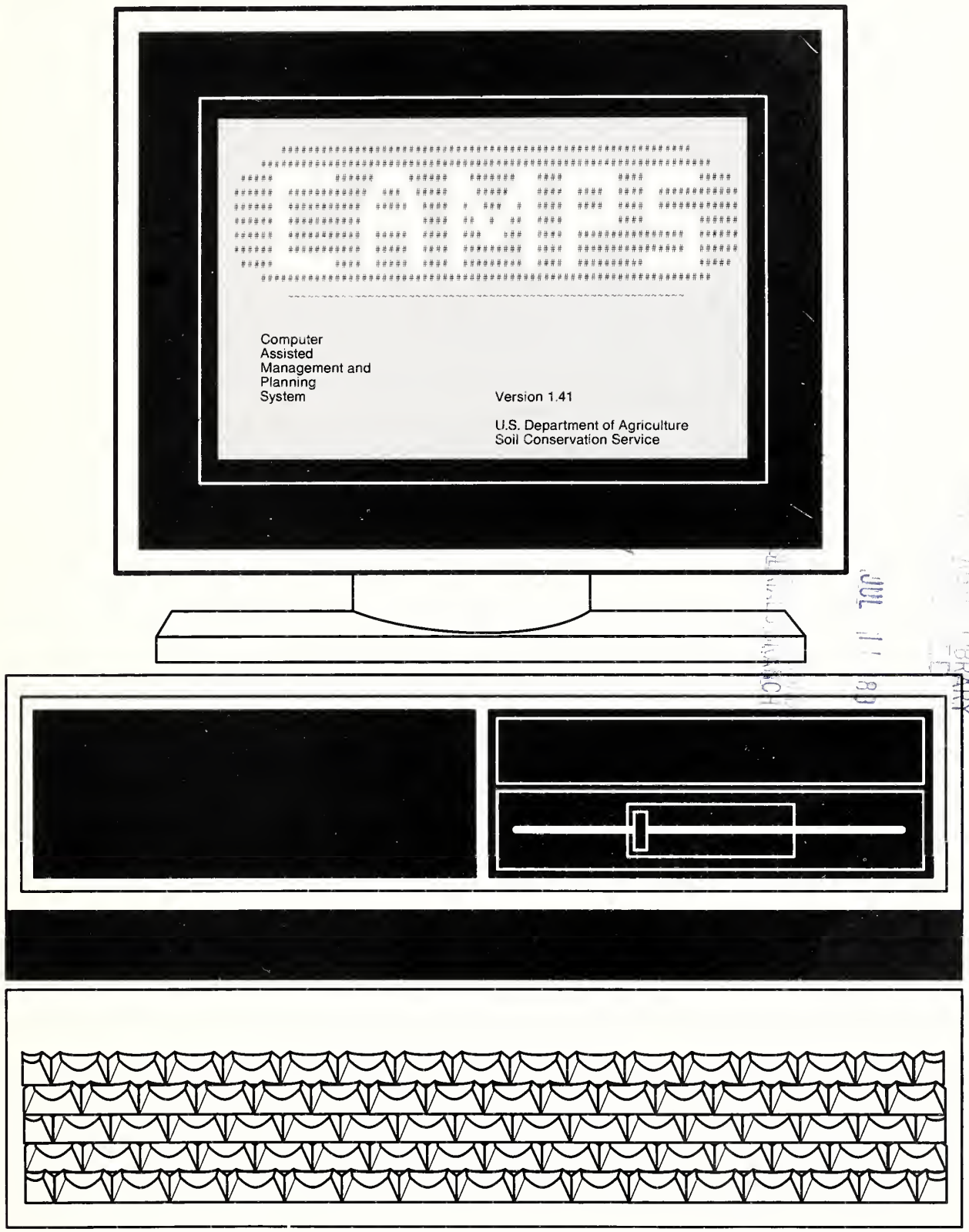

Cover: CAMPS, the Computer Assisted Management and Planning System, is moving to the forefront of Soil Conservation Service field office operations. (Illustration by Chris Lozos.)

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Comments from the SCS Chief:

Planning With CAMPS

It's always good to visit one of our field offices and see some of the local Soil Conservation Service staff working on a modern computer. Whether they're developing conservation plans or attending to clerical and administrative chores, I'm convinced they're using the latest and the best technology that we can afford and the result will be better service to farmers and ranchers. This is especially important as we work to meet the conservation planning and application deadlines under the Food Security Act of 1985.

Now I don't know much about computers. In fact, you might say I know just enough to be dangerous. But SCS computer experts have designed a computer system that is as modern as some of those I've seen farmers and ranchers using in their own operations.

The SCS hardware is called the Field Office Communication and Automation System, or FOCAS for short. If you know how to ask it, this equipment can do just about anything having to do with storing or retrieving information. Its main job is to run specially designed SCS computer software programs called CAMPS, or Computer Assisted Management and Planning System.

About 75 percent of our field offices now have at least one microcomputer. Most of those staffs are already using CAMPS in their day-to-day operations, and we're installing more FOCAS hardware and CAMPS software as fast as we can.

I'd like to say two things to you field office staffs who are soon to receive your computers: One is to take some time to get acquainted with them. Most staffs say the time spent learning to use them properly is more than made up for by increased efficiency down the road. And, two, even though computers may seem like a dream come true, they're only as good as the information you put in them and the people who run them. And I think we've got the best of both.

CAMPS:

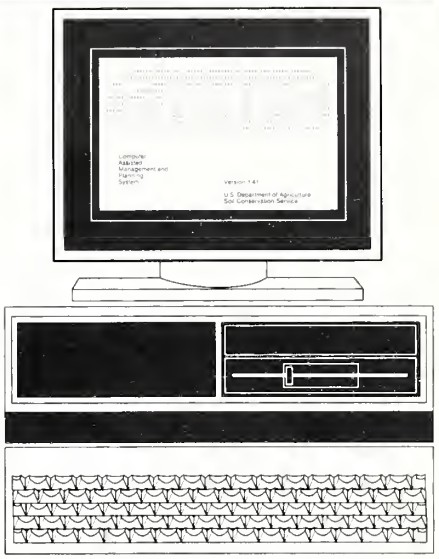
A New Way To Plan

COMPUTER SOFTWARE called CAMPS (Computer Assisted Management and Planning System) is changing the way Soil Conservation Service field offices do business, according to Sherman Lewis, director of the Conservation Planning Division at Soil Conservation Service National Headquarters (NHQ) in Washington, D.C. CAMPS can perform a wide variety of jobs, from conservation planning to scheduling and filing.

Field office staffs who have already mastered the use of CAMPS report they are now able to do more and do it faster and more efficiently. CAMPS is proving to be especially valuable in handling conservation planning and application workloads under the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985.

The first step in developing the CAMPS software was the setting up in 1984 of the Field Office Software Development Team, consisting of SCS district conservationists, area conservationists, State office specialists, and National Headquarters (NHQ) staff. The team looked at the work being done in field offices and recommended tasks to automate. The top four automation needs identified were implementing resource conservation programs, managing and administering the field office, conducting public information programs, and training.

In June 1985, the Field Office Relational Database Pilot Test was begun to develop an operational database consisting of the Client Operating Record and soil data.



Another objective was to provide initial training on the use of relational database technology. The test was completed in November 1985.

In late 1985, the Field Office Support Staff (FOSS) was established at Fort Collins, Colo., under the Information Resources Management (IRM) Division at NHQ. The staff, headed by SCS Supervisory Soil Conservationist Owen Unangst, consists of seven soil conservationists, one soil scientist, one economist, and one computer systems analyst. It receives technical assistance in coding, analysis, and quality control from a private contractor.

Testing of the ALPHA CAMPS (version 1.0) began in June 1986. Version 1.0 was an advanced prototype designed primarily to test the system's structure as a national framework. The test indicated modifications and design changes needed to meet State and local needs while maintaining national standards. The software's menu structure and program modules

A New Way To Do

were tested for accuracy, usability, and reliability. The test involved 19 field office sites, 1 NHQ site, and 4 National Technical Center sites. The ALPHA test was completed in September 1986.

In April 1987, the BETA CAMPS Test (version 1.1) was started at 24 primary sites, 12 UNIX and 12 DOS. Some State offices also installed BETA CAMPS in other field offices as secondary test sites. The objectives of this test were to:

- Test the menu structure and hierarchy against national, State, and local requirements for field offices.
- Test individual program modules against the needs of field offices and national requirements.
- Evaluate and refine the effectiveness of CAMPS training, user/system documentation, support, and maintenance.
- Estimate the benefits of CAMPS through improved employee efficiencies and improved quality of work.
- Develop a basis for refining analysis and design of program modules to enhance CAMPS.
- Identify the support requirements for field offices using CAMPS.

The BETA CAMPS test was completed in March 1988.

In October 1987, the FOSS Team was transferred from the IRM Division to the Conservation Planning Division (CPD), and additional releases of CAMPS were made to help handle the FSA workload.

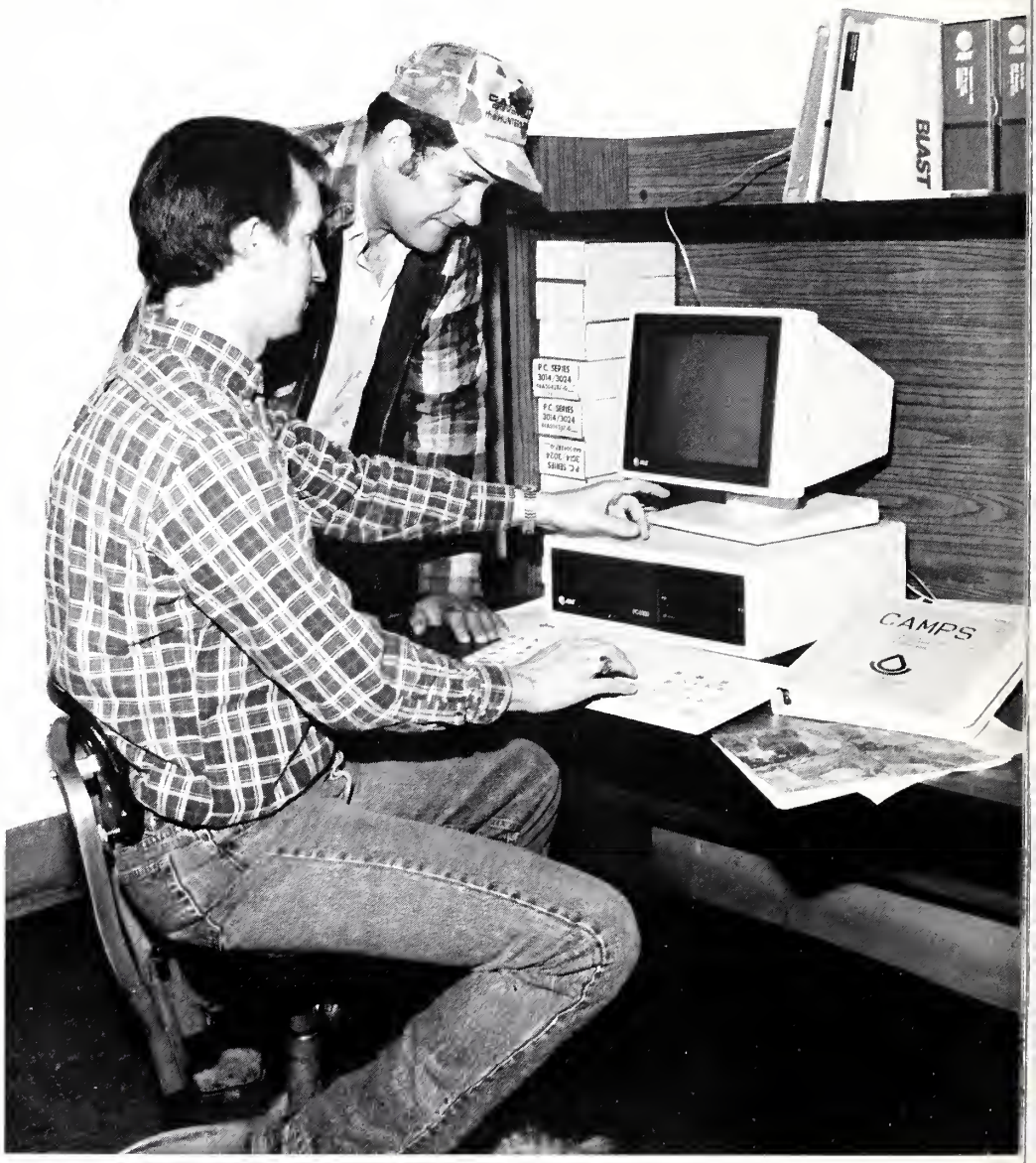
In December 1987, version 1.21 of CAMPS was released. This version provided some fixes and enhancements to solve some of the problems encountered with BETA CAMPS.

In March 1988, version 1.3 of CAMPS was released. This version provided:

- An FSA tracking system.
- FSA conservation plan writing capability.
- The capability of sharing farm tract and client data with the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

In September 1988, version 1.4 of CAMPS was released. This version added:

- Progress reporting.
- Compatibility with the National Progress Reporting System.
- Conservation planning enhancements.



CAMPS computer program is used by John Mustain, SCS district conservationist at Chandler, Okla., seated, to help local landowner Dale Stein develop conservation plan. (Photo by F. Dwain Phillips.)

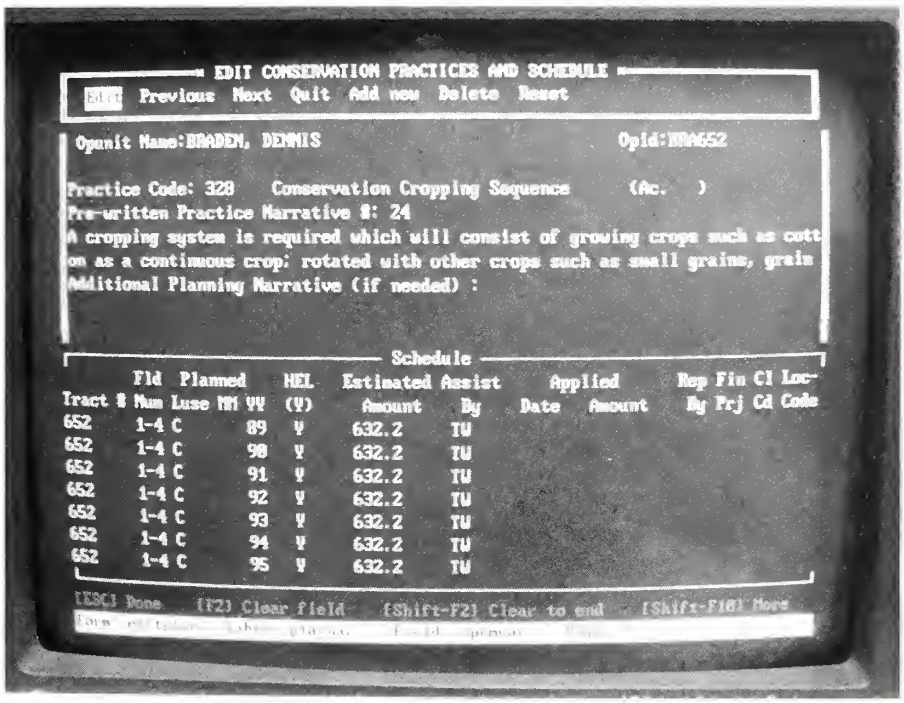
Conservation Planning...

• Automatic query generation.
• A UNIX version of the ICE (Interactive Conservation Evaluation) program, which displays the net returns for several alternative conservation treatments.

As of February 1989, SCS offices in 2,138 counties, 70 percent of the counties in the United States, had CAMPS loaded on their computers. There were 606 UNIX sites and 1,532 DOS sites. CAMPS has been implemented in all SCS offices in 23 States and in 90 percent of the offices in 5 more States.

The plan is to release version 1.5 in both the UNIX and DOS operating systems in June 1989. This version will add additional modules (UNIX LTC and Grassed Waterway) and enhancements to version 1.4.

Version 2.0 of CAMPS will be released approximately 12 months after the selection of a new Data Base Management System. This version will incorporate new components in addition to what it has now. The new functions include faster, more efficient record keeping, tracking, and reporting programs and will include common user interfaces, standard query language, security measures, and a data dictionary. The new version also will have a better system of documentation.



Ready for editing, a typical CAMPS screen shows conservation cropping sequence for 1989 through 1995. (Photo by Dale D. Allen.)

UNIX is a multi-user, multi-task computer operating system allowing simultaneous access to CAMPS by more than one system user. It will also provide an improved security system.

To ensure that CAMPS is easy to use and meets their needs, field office staffs have been involved in every step of development and testing. The design of CAMPS 2.0 is, for example, based on test results and 340 responses to a questionnaire on software needs distributed to field offices in March 1988. Respondents identified practical training in the application of CAMPS as top priority. They also said CAMPS should be as reliable, flexible, and simple to use as possible.

SCS staffs at all levels are working toward these goals. A good system and people well trained to use it will help to meet the demands of the FSA workload today as well as the soil and water conservation needs of the future.

Rick Perrygo, public affairs specialist, SCS, Washington, D.C.

and Scheduling

Kansas Pulls Ahead With CAMPS

WHEN THE SOIL Conservation Service released the first version of CAMPS in 1986, Kansas was one of the first States where it was tested. Now, SCS field offices in the State wouldn't be without it.

CAMPS (Computer Assisted Management and Planning System) is a computer software program designed for SCS field offices. It helps with preparing conservation plans, generating reports, filing, computing soil losses, developing engineering designs, reporting progress, making mass mailings, and other activities.

According to Lonnie Schulze, State resource conservationist for SCS in Kansas, CAMPS is proving essential in writing compliance plans written to ensure that Kansas farmers and ranchers remain eligible for program benefits under the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985. Schulze said the 105 SCS field offices in Kansas went from manual operations to complete automation with CAMPS in 2 years. All field offices are also reporting progress to the agency's National Progress Reporting System through CAMPS.

Kansas is one of five States in which every SCS field office operates in UNIX CAMPS. UNIX is a multi-user, multi-tasking computer operating system that will run the production version of CAMPS

Donald Bircher, right, receives conservation planning assistance for his highly erodible land in Ellsworth County, Kans., from Virgil Beougher, SCS district conservationist.

Conservation on the land begins here, with decisions and applications recorded on paper.

"Keeping track of information through CAMPS and being more up to date on farming operations gives us more credibility in responding to and getting information for landowners," Hart said.

when it is released in the summer of 1990.

Rod Marcotte, district conservationist at the Norton, Kans., field office, said the real advantage of CAMPS is in implementing FSA. "With CAMPS we're able to develop audience lists by practice codes," Marcotte said. "We can call up all existing plans for a particular practice in the database and format a letter reminding the landowners when it is scheduled. The result is more timely assistance to keep their compliance plans on track."

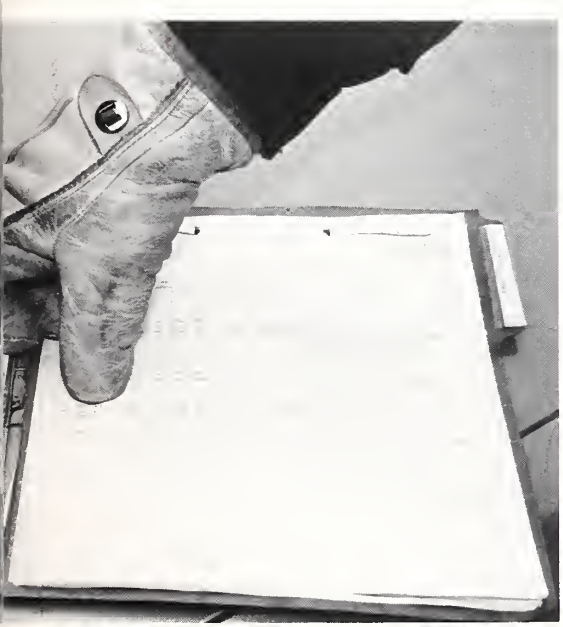
Jeff Hart, district conservationist in Osage City, Kans., said without CAMPS he would have a 2-year backlog in writing compliance plans. But with CAMPS his office is almost finished with compliance planning.

"Keeping track of information through CAMPS and being more up to date on farming operations gives us more credibility in responding to and getting information for landowners," Hart said. "I think they respect our operation a lot more."

For Virgil Beougher, district conservationist in Ellsworth, Kans., saving time is the best aspect of CAMPS. "As far as FSA planning is concerned, for every 10 hours spent doing it manually, we can now do it on the computer in one hour," he said. Beougher's field office has 100 percent of its anticipated compliance plans written. "Without CAMPS," he said, "we'd probably be about half done with planning."

Norm Doehring, deputy SCS State conservationist, said the Kansas State office is also using CAMPS as a management tool. "We are doing a workload analysis by looking at plans scheduled for implementation between 1990 and 1994," he said. "Seeing what the workload is going to be across the State will help us determine future staffing needs."

Lori L. Bredow, public affairs specialist intern, SCS, Salina, Kans.



SCS District Conservationist Virgil Beougher, still smiling after a morning spent editing conservation plans with CAMPS in Ellsworth, Kans., field office.

"We took advantage of the ability to develop State and local options provided in CAMPS," he said. "These options helped adapt CAMPS software to specific State needs."

CAMPS Helps Manage FSA Workload

IMAGINE YOU'RE A Soil Conservation Service district conservationist in a field office serving 2,000 farm units covering nearly 200,000 acres of highly erodible land. By the end of 1994, under the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985, you and your staff must help operators apply approved soil conservation plans on 3,000 tracts of land.

You've been doing conservation planning for the past 2 years. Followup will be needed on planned practices to help operators meet the FSA deadline for completing their plans to remain eligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture program benefits. How do you know what practices are planned and how many? When are they to be applied, and how will you keep track of the followup that must be done?

The workload described belongs to the Logan, Iowa, field office, and District Conservationist Russ Kurth and his staff are finding the answers to these questions with the help of CAMPS (Computer Assisted Management and Planning System). CAMPS was developed by SCS to help field offices plan and manage soil conservation assistance programs.

"I was skeptical of CAMPS at first," said Kurth. "We were learning the system at the same time our workload for conservation planning was greatest, and like many people I was afraid it would slow us down. Today, there's no doubt in my mind we made the right decision to automate at the field office level. We have 95 percent of our plans entered into CAMPS. Now, we've got an accurate picture of our workload on all planned practices. We know in this county, for instance, that we've planned about a million feet of terraces a year for the next 6 years."

It recently took Kurth less than an hour to develop a mailing list to generate reminder letters to 95 farmers, most of whom had sod-busted land and planned to install field borders. "If we hadn't set the information up in CAMPS, we would have had to search about 2,500 paper case files to look at individual plans," said Kurth. "There's no way we could have done that."

Field offices throughout the State report similar accomplishments with CAMPS.

The SCS State office in Iowa has made a full commitment to equip, train, and support field offices, adopted a team approach, and developed State and local software options in CAMPS to meet specialized needs. Each area office received an AT&T-3B2 computer system in 1986. By the end of 1987, a fourth of the soil and water conservation districts had purchased AT&T 6300 microcomputers. In 1987 and 1988, an AT&T-3B2/400 computer system was installed in every SCS field office in Iowa. The system includes a printer, modem, three to five independent workstations, and a digitizing tablet, as well as software.

The conference room in the SCS State office was converted to a CAMPS training center from February to September 1988. Every district conservationist, area conservationist, and area resource conservationist attended two 2-day CAMPS workshops, and all conservation district clerks attended a 2-day support meeting. Videotapes were also produced to use in training field personnel.

Bob Dayton, SCS State agronomist, spends half his time working with field offices and CAMPS programmers. "We took advantage of the ability to develop State and local options provided in CAMPS," he said. "These options helped adapt CAMPS software to specific State needs. We've struggled some, and people have been frustrated. That happens with anything new. Despite these things, many early skeptics are now strong supporters.

"Our field offices could have done sketchy conservation plans for FSA, but with manual typing there's no way the plans could have been as comprehensive as they are now," Dayton said. "The plans are also consistent, and CAMPS will make a world of difference when it's time to revise plans. We'll be able to manage our followup program the way we've always wanted to manage it."

Lynn Betts, public affairs specialist, SCS, Des Moines, Iowa

CAMPing In Tennessee

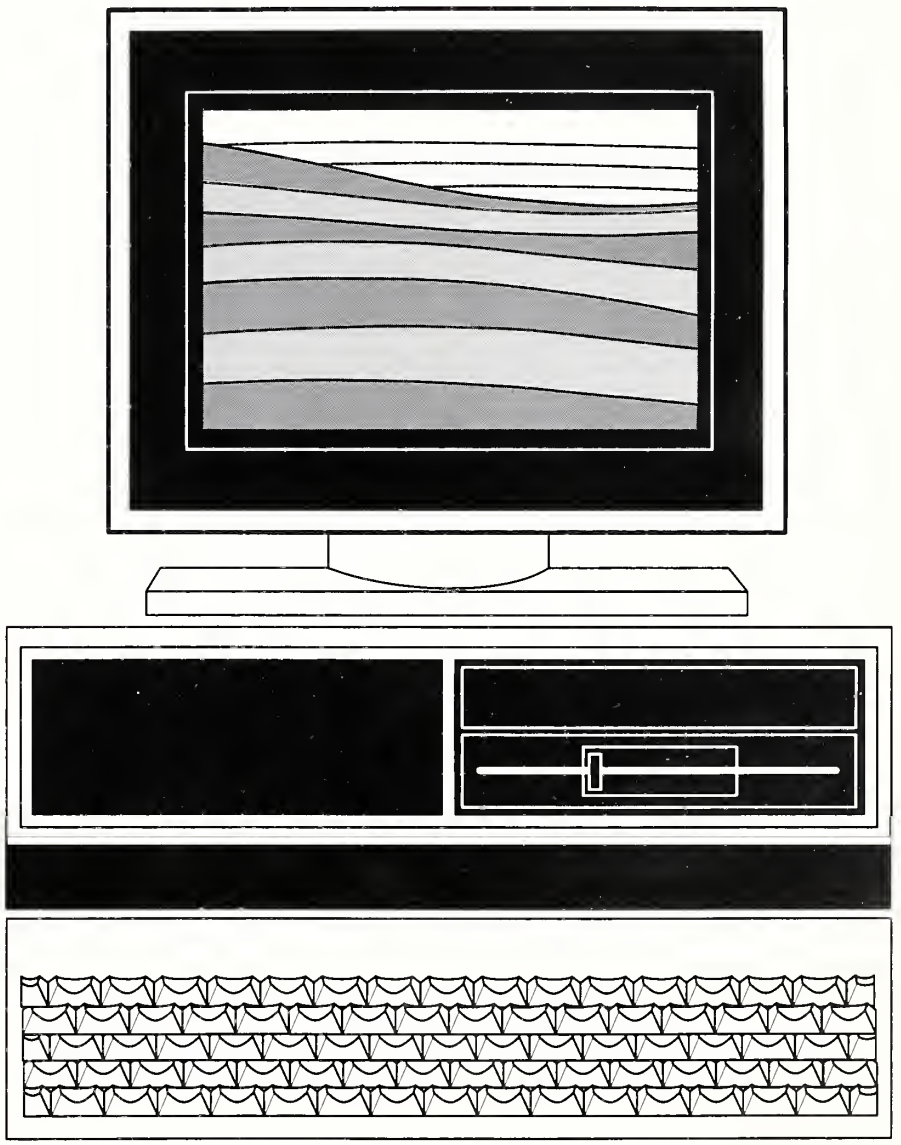
"CAMPS IS THE best thing that has happened to us since air-conditioned trucks," said Chris Moyers, district conservationist for the Soil Conservation Service in the Columbia, Tenn., field office. And, as anyone who has ever driven much in Tennessee during the summer can tell you, this is high praise.

CAMPS (the Computer Assisted Management and Planning System) is designed to help save time for SCS field office personnel. From the State's eastern mountains to the western flatlands, SCS employees in Tennessee have welcomed CAMPS as a way of handling the increased complexity and scope of the conservation planning workload resulting from the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985. Currently, 63 of the agency's 95 field offices in the State are using CAMPS and most of the remaining field offices want CAMPS as soon as possible.

Although CAMPS can be used for developing long-term contracts, land treatment watershed plans, and other special projects, a cost analysis indicates that CAMPS will save enough staff time in FSA plan management alone to pay for itself. Future applications will include a CAMPS-generated self-certification form for FSA plan practices. The form will include operator information, a practice narrative, field information, schedules, and space for the operator to describe and certify application. The system can also be used to prepare a cover letter and mailing label for each certification form.

"Budget and manpower levels dictated that automation was the logical tool for providing better service to our clients," said Jerry Lee, SCS State conservationist. "The availability and easy access of the planning data has meant that staff time can be spent more effectively and efficiently with landowners. The resulting product, the conservation plan, is produced much faster and represents a broader choice of alternatives for the landowner."

Herb Paugh, State CAMPS coordinator, SCS, Nashville, Tenn.



"Please show them around, put them to work, and treat them like family."

NHQ Staffers In the Field

EMPLOYEES OF THE Soil Conservation Service get around. In a special field orientation program established by SCS Chief Wilson Scaling, 26 members of the Information Resources Management (IRM) Division at SCS National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., spent a week each last year at one of the agency's nearly 3,000 field offices.

Perhaps more than anything else, IRM means computers. It is the division that is implementing the Field Office Communications and Automation System (FOCAS), and most IRM employees are computer specialists.

"These staff are professionals in IRM, but most do not have the farm or ranch background of typical SCS employees," Scaling wrote to the host staffs. "Please show them around, put them to work, and treat them like family."

One of the employees was Mary Thomas, a computer systems analyst who came to work for SCS in 1987 after working for two other USDA agencies. Before spending a week in the Bloomfield, Iowa, field office, she had never before been in an SCS field office.

The highlight of her week, Thomas said, was helping a small grain farmer develop a conservation plan. "I knew about CAMPS (the agency's Computer Assisted Management and Planning System)," she said, "but it was a new experience to sit down with a farmer and actually work through the program. The district conservationist just put us in a room together with a computer and we did it. I was nervous, but we got through it okay and developed a pretty good conservation plan. The farmer had a lot of sloping land and was really concerned about reducing the erosion."

Bob Kling, another systems analyst, accompanied the SCS field office staff in Lake Stevens, Wash., on followup visits to local dairy farms that were installing waste management sytems.

"They were putting in conservation systems–not just individual practices," he said. "And that's exactly what we try to do in IRM. We take the long-range view of things. The waste lagoon we saw being put in that week is part of a system that will benefit future generations."

Only 2 weeks before Don Whitcomb visited the field office in Minden, Nev., the vegetation on a nearby mountain had been destroyed by fire. Whitcomb, a computer specialist, helped with surveying and attended a meeting of representatives of local, State, and other Federal agencies who were developing a plan to reclaim the burned areas to prevent excessive soil erosion.

"I got to see firsthand how we work with other agencies," Whitcomb said. "It helps to see the role our people play so that we can support them better. Sometimes we lose track of that."

Whitcomb said the experience made one thing clear to him about the use of computers in field offices. "I now realize that ease-of-use is a primary concern," he said. "Field office personnel really don't have the time to sit down and learn how to use complex hardware or software."

A similar message was brought back by Evelyn Robertson. "My 22 years of working with computers has taught me that they should be a useful tool and not an imposition," she said.

Robertson spent a week in the Lincoln, Nebr., field office, which, because of its suburban location, provides a variety of services to a diverse clientele. She accompanied the field office staff as they advised small grain farmers on how to meet the conservation compliance deadline of the Food Security Act, helped lay out terraces, inspected the work of a contractor, visited a homeowner concerned about an eroding lawn and a wet basement, discussed possible sites for an upcoming land judging contest, and briefed a visiting soil scientist from a foreign country.

"I just tried to stay out of their way and to be some help," she said. "The field office staff was willing to take the time to include us in the work they were doing, and I now have an even greater appreciation of the services they provide. Only by understanding what they need will we be able to help them do their jobs."

Paul D. Barker, associate editor, *Soil and Water Conservation News*, Washington, D.C.

Field and area office staffs soon found they were using a whole new vocabulary to discuss conservation planning.

Washington State Proves Value of CAMPS

THERE WAS A time when Harold Crose had his doubts about CAMPS, the Computer Assisted Management and Planning System for automating field offices of the Soil Conservation Service. Now Crose praises CAMPS as "more than a planning tool–it's an office environment."

Crose, district conservationist in charge of the SCS field office in Othello, Wash., became concerned about CAMPS shortly after his office received the program in 1988. He saw production fall off as his staff began spending more time at the computer console learning how to use CAMPS than writing conservation plans. After his employees learned to use CAMPS, however, they pulled ahead of schedule in writing conservation plans to help farmers and ranchers comply with the Food Security Act (FSA) of 1985. According to FSA, those who farm highly erodible land must have a conservation plan by the end of 1989 if they are to continue to receive program benefits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Crose sees CAMPS not only as a tool for developing conservation plans but as an office environment that saves time in the preparation of reports and other management activities. "All our people are doing progress reports on CAMPS," he said, "and I've got all my cumulative data in CAMPS that tell me where the field office is. Anytime I want to know where any of my employees are in their progress, I can hit a button and I've got that data. When my boss wants that data, I can track our field office progress immediately. That is really important."

SCS began installing CAMPS in Washington's 45 field offices in early 1988. Each field office staff was then given 2 days of training on location. While the training was being conducted by the State CAMPS coordinator, the area CAMPS trainer initialized the local system, loading the appropriate soil surveys and the field office table and staff table, which contain such items as field office name, address, telephone number, location code, and staff member initials.

Before statewide training was finished on CAMPS version 1.2, a second version, 1.3, was being installed. The second version incorporated many suggestions for improvement–such as an option facilitating the transferring of tracts between operating units, which was difficult to do in the earlier version. Late in 1988, the current version, 1.4, was introduced, and field office staffs began working with RMS, or Record Management System, and Conservation System Identification, which meant something like–but not quite the same as–Resource Management System.

From the time the first CAMPS package was installed in October 1987 in the State office in Spokane, the statewide implementation of CAMPS has involved employees at all levels. State office employees duplicated technical manuals and user handbooks, downloaded soil surveys onto diskettes, copied backup diskettes, and developed programs for applying wind erosion equations and other factors.

Area conservationists have made funds available for field offices to hire temporary help to load basic inventory information on fields, soils, and other features. SCS soil scientists are helping to write narratives for the nontechnical soils descriptions. Foresters, range conservationists, agronomists, and engineers are helping to write practice narratives as well as nontechnical narratives for the nontechnical soils descriptions.

For most field office operations, CAMPS has reduced the repetition of typing many kinds of narratives on conservation plans. By adding data from USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, most of the field offices have improved their mailing lists. Many field offices are also using CAMPS to write letters and address labels to many groups and individuals affected by FSA. As a result, several district conservationists in the State say CAMPS is a big reason their field offices are ahead of schedule in FSA planning.

Bruce Robinson, public affairs specialist intern, SCS, Santa Rosa, Calif.

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Field Day For FSA Planning

HOW DO YOU contact absentee landowners who own highly erodible land and who need conservation plans? Soil Conservation Service District Conservationist Terry Whigham and Range Conservationist William Conrad of Fort Stockton, Tex., ran an information campaign and held a conservation planning field day using the Computer Assisted Management and Planning System (CAMPS).

Whigham and Conrad had not received responses from 39 people who owned highly erodible land and who needed to have an approved conservation plan before the end of 1989 to remain eligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture program benefits under the Food Security Act of 1985. In cooperation with the Trans-Pecos Conservation District, Whigham and Conrad put together an information campaign to reach them that included articles in newspapers in the three towns where the landowners lived, an interview with the county executive director of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) committee on a local radio station, and a personalized CAMPS-generated form letter inviting the landowners to attend the conservation planning field day.

"In the letter, we told them they could call and make an appointment, or come in anytime, and we would get to them as quickly as possible," said Whigham.

A folder for each farm was prepared before the meeting under the guidance of Conservation District Secretary Deborah Smith. The folders contained aerial photographs; soil survey information; the AD-1026, a form from ASCS on highly erodible land determination; and a farm planning worksheet.

Whigham and Conrad took the field office computer and printer to the field day, which was held this past January in the conference room of a gin at Coyanosa, an irrigated cotton farming area. They chose that location because the coffee counter at the gin is a popular meeting place for local farmers.

Eighteen farmers came to the field day. When they got there, they received conservation systems guide sheets for the soils on their farms and descriptions of the most commonly used practices written as sample plans.

With the help of SCS Area Range Conservationist George Peacock of Pecos, Whigham or Conrad would design the plan on the computer for one farmer while the other two conservationists explained five or six alternative plans to those waiting. Every hour or so, they switched places.

The conservationists wrote plans from 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Each plan took less than 20 minutes from the first keystroke to the signature. "It went like clockwork," said Whigham. "Nobody complained, and everybody went home happy."

"What surprised us," said Whigham, "was seven farmers called before the meeting and scheduled a date to prepare their plans. Twelve other farmers scheduled appointments for after the meeting. In all, another 18 farmers prepared plans for land that will be sodbusted for pima cotton."

Dale D. Allen, public affairs specialist, SCS, Temple, Tex.